

HORÆ GERMANICÆ. NO. I.

Wer das Dichten will verstehen
 Muss in 's Land der Dichtung gehen
 Wer den Dichter will verstehen
 Muss in Dichters Lande gehen.

Gedichte sind gemahlte Fensterscheiben
 Sicht man vom macht in die Kirche hinein
 Da ist alles dunkel und düster

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 Kommt aber nur einmal herein
 Begrüsst die heilige capelle
 Da ist's auf einmal farbig hell
 Geschicht und Herrath glänzt in Schnelle
 Bedeuteud wirkt ein edler scheln.

If any one talent in this world of mediocrity be more decidedly rare than the rest, it is the talent of translation, especially of poetry; or rather to carry the idea fairly out, it may be questioned whether any such thing as translating poetry, be possible at all. A good poem in one language, is often the exciting cause of a good or bad poem in another, which last shall be called a translation, as Pope's *Iliad* for instance, is called a translation of Homer; but does not every school-boy of any cleverness know, that though you may translate Homer's *Iliad* or his *Odyssey* for ever and ever, yet you never can translate *him*. Talma may take off Alexander, that's one step down, and a travelled ape may serve you up an imitation of Talma, that's another, and that brings you to about the distance from the conqueror, that most translations keep from their originals; for most of them are made under the double disadvantage, of an imperfect apprehension by the translator himself of the real genius of his author, and of an imperfect fashion of rendering what he does apprehend. Let somebody attitudinize to show you what the *Apollo Belvedere* is, or the *Venus de Medicis*, allow for their defects of conception and memory, their faults of form, and the disadvantages of "pantaloons and boddices," and then say whether such an exhibition satisfies or diminishes at all your desire to study with your own eyes those wonders of the chisel. If it does not, then

never excuse your indolence in not learning languages upon any substitute you can get for knowing them by borrowing the knowledge of others; but above all, never depreciate nor disparage the untasted fruits, but suppress your envy when those who can taste, boast of them.

The most remarkable poem of the present age, beyond all doubt or competition, is *Goethe's Faust*. There is but one voice on this matter among those who know it; but between these and those who do not know it, there is a gulph fixed, so that those who would pass into the class of the initiated cannot, except by an earnest application to the German; for I take it for granted few are ignorant of that work, who are not also ignorant of the language in which it is written. I would fain say something by way of insisting on the inducements to this study, and with this view shall attempt to give an account of some of the most striking passages in *Faust*, with occasional English versions of some stanzas, for which versions I claim the indulgence I have claimed for translators in general, to wit, that of being considered to have failed in an impossible undertaking. The ground work of the poem is the old superstition of *Dr. Faust*; that matters little, for in the progress of thinking in the present age no one cares much for the mere story, the canvas or skeleton of a work. We look for the author—for the poet—for opinions—allusions—satiric-reflections—originality of remark not incident—for beautiful expressions, lively conversations, and play of fancy—and where these are, we care not whether the story be one handed down from *Boccaccio* or the *Queen of Navarre*, and a hundred times repeated, or a new fiction just born of the author's brain—indeed the last seems more like being introduced to strangers, and the chances are that it will therefore interest us less. The nature and character, truth and application of the sentiments and incidents strike us more forcibly when the parties concerned are our old familiar friends, than they can among new faces, and we require too that there should be a keeping and harmony in what we are told, with what we know already, and that our new ideas, should we be so fortunate as to get any, shall mix readily and kindly with the old. *Faust* is a pleasant book in this respect—the episode of *Margaret* it is true is *Goethe's* own, but the principal characters of the doctor and his tempter are faithful to the ancient letter. The devil is “proportioned as one's heart could wish a” devil—his cloven foot is not forgotten, and the superstitions of the

magic powers of the number three, and of the blind working of mysterious triangles and pentagrams, are preserved entire. Faust sells his soul on the usual terms, and there is nothing very singular either in his reasons for doing so—he has consumed the resources of life—he has found that all wisdom is sorrow and much study weariness—his familiarity with pleasure has extended to disgust—his familiarity with science to contempt, and his imagination can conceive no happiness in such a world, even though its wildest flights within the bounds of nature could be realized. He pours forth curses upon his existence, and in the deep feeling of the nothingness or inanity of the past and of the present, he finds an argument to despise or doubt the future, and by questioning its reality, justifies his recklessness as to any retribution he may heap upon it. Mephistopheles avails himself with the skill, peculiar to his tribe, of these favourable dispositions of the doctor. He gets leave first to tempt him, in a scene in heaven like that in Job, when he appears however as a wag only—a lover of fun and mischief—a scoffer, but not a fiendish destroyer; but in the end he turns out very evil disposed, even for a devil, delighting not merely in freaks and dilemmas, but in inflicting bitter anguish and in mocking it. Every one remembers the passage in Sterne in the theological arguments between Dr. Slop and my Uncle Toby. But the devil, says Dr. Slop, is damned to all eternity. I am very sorry for it, says my Uncle Toby. Whe-e-e-eugh, says Dr. Slop. My Uncle Toby's goodness of heart in this passage is most excellent, and until I read Faust I always thought with him; but if he should extend his pity to Mephistopheles, I should rather cry Whe-e-e-eugh with Dr. Slop.

Between Faust and the devil it is all fair play. One grudges the old monopolizer his purchase of another eternal jewel certainly, but the doctor makes out his case so clearly, that the best thing he can do is to sell, that we yield to the conviction, and however we may disapprove the transaction, we do not feel that we could have prevented it, or opposed it to any purpose had we been there. Fight dog fight bear, it is the proverb's justice, and a man full of years and experience who has been hacknied, jostled, *blasé*, through a long life, may lay the blame on his own capacity if he does not become toward the end of it a pretty fair match for a fiend. But Margaret, poor Margaret, how different is all this with her—she is painted so lovely, so confiding, so

child-like, artless, yet so guilty—she speaks from her failing heart such a voice of suppliant agony, that there should be a spirit found to give it an echo in reproaches—to aggravate her misery and drive her to despair, it is a thing too horrible for a poet even to imagine of the devil. We seem to feel her tears falling, to hear her sobs in the broken sentences, and to look round for her gentle form with words of comfort and reassurance rising to our lips—be of good cheer—thy sins are forgiven thee. Such feelings rise so irresistibly that one expects to find them every where, even in the child and father of perdition, and it is a disappointment and a new and deeper stain even on his character that he has them not.

The poem opens with an address of the author to the creatures of his fancy—the society of his declining age—the replacers of the companionships of his youth. It is very sweet and mournful and solemn, but seems to have no very direct bearing in any thing that follows. It has been done into English by Lord Levison Gower, and so done, that even to the mere English reader the vague melody of the original words conveys more of the spirit of the writer than all the sense of the translation. For the German is a language eminently poetical, of plastic ductility and infinitely rich, and admitting in a high degree of that suitableness of sound to sense, of which we talk so much and show so few examples. They who are ignorant and wish to be witty on this subject, may be witty if they can, or failing that, they may resort to the old story of the emperor who thought the German a fit language for his horse—fitter no doubt than for himself. But the initiated know, and the uninitiated may learn, if they will be reasonable, that no modern European language combines so many attractions as the German. Its facility for compound words—the versatility of its inversions—its faculty of appropriating entire foreign dialects to its own use, and working them in to its own texture—its energy, sweetness, and expression—these are the things to be weighed and estimated, and which the wise may be easily won to appreciate, in utter contempt of the small dust of the baldrick, of old saws about emperors and horses, and of studied bombast of reiterated gutturals, and “*acht hundert acht und achtzig achteckige hechs koepe.*”

This poem is followed by a prelude in the theatre behind the curtain, where the stage manager appears between his clown and poet, as preparing for the first exhibition of the new

drama. The manager is full of anxiety. He exhorts the poet on the subject of his work as if it were still to do—as if he were there to inspire the actors, or to possess them in the very hour of their performance, and he supplicates for invention, novelty, variety, incident, and spirit, as one whose means of living depend on the event. He classes the poet and the clown together as the pillars of his hope—he reminds them that they have stood by him thus far through foul and fair, and begs them not to desert him here in his extremest need—he lectures them upon public taste and the most infallible clap-traps and baits for applause, and declares it is far better to get cash from the present generation, than the shadowy hope of a harvest of praise from the next. All this is as nuts to the clown—to the poet bitter ashes. Suppose, says the former, scoffingly, I too should talk about posterity and neglect my business, who would make sport for the world that is passing—yet this must have its pleasures. You know what we stand in need of, dish it up for us by old rules and approved receipts, a love adventure, hopes, fears, and a catastrophe, a little noise and tinsel, and all goes down. But the dealer in metre stands upon his dignity—he speaks disrespectfully of the mob—gets on his high horse and appeals to future ages—then thinks of bygone days, and promises passionately that if they can be recalled, all contradictions shall be reconciled, all impossibilities performed, and all parties satisfied.

Ay, once again those moments bring,
When early hopes, a ripening throng,
Poured from the heart's perpetual spring,
Uninterrupted joy and song.
When morning mists, all dim and gray,
Around life's rugged steeps were curl'd,
And all the vales with flowers were gay,
And buds just opening to display
The promise of a magic world.
Possessing nought, yet rich—how sweet
That love of truth—that self-deceit—
That chainless impulse—bid it move
Those hopes—those passions—bid them burn—
That strength of hatred—power of love
And youth—oh bid my youth return.

This, however, is asking too much, but the manager smooths him down as well as he can, and comforts him for the control he cannot have over time and the past, by offering the regions of space and all that therein is to his absolute disposal. He begs him again to astonish the expectant audience to the very

top of their expectations, and makes over to him, his mimic universe full of materials for the purpose.

Command your utmost heart's desire,
Suns, moons, and stars, nor save, nor spare,
And walls of rock and seas of fire,
And living things of earth and air.—
Exhaust creation's wildest range,
Its tribute far and wide compel,
And lead your scenes with skilful change,
From heav'n, throughout the earth, and hell.

I pause here to express my utter dissatisfaction, disappointment, and anger, at Lord Levison Gower. This dialogue, which in the original is eminently characteristic and full of sentiments, which though the situation makes them border on ridicule, are yet natural and true—vividly brought out and strikingly contrasted—all this, I say, he has tamed down in his translation, so that the greater part of it is not fit for the poet's corner in a village newspaper. One passage deserves to be excepted—it is the first of those I have translated, and I shall cite his version here, because one or two ideas in the lines in italics are preserved from the original in his, which are lost, or nearly so, in mine—in the rest my own, as a translation, is most accurate of the two.

Then give me back those days of feeling,
When I was an expectant too—
When through the wilds of fancy stealing,
The stream of song was ever new—
When morning mists the scene surrounded,
And buds foretold the promised rose—
When bee-like o'er the flowers I bounded,
And plucked and rifled as I chose.
Enough yet little formed my treasure—
The hope of truth—illusion's present pleasure.
Give me the active spring of gladness,
Of pleasure stretch'd almost to pain—
My hate, my love, in all their madness—
Give me my youth again.

A passage which follows this is tolerably done, but all the rest is bad, excessively; but I do not complain of this so much, because it is in virtue of a privilege I have claimed for the whole herd of translators—*servum pecus*—but he has changed a corner stone of the design. Instead of the stage buffoon or clown, he introduces *a friend* with the manager and poet, thus destroying some of the liveliest points of the conversation, and deadening the little spirit that had not been distilled out of it

and carried off with the original dialect. He takes a freedom quite as unwarrantable in the next scene, of which he leaves out an important part, without a word of apology or hint at its existence in the German. It is a prelude, in Heaven. The angels are introduced singing anthems of praise; after which Mephistopheles enters and the conversation which Lord L. G. omits, follows between him and the Creator. It has too direct a bearing on the action of the piece to be thus passed over in dead silence, though it may not be very possible or desirable to render it in English—its familiarity is too decidedly profane and it must get new faults in any version. The only attempt I know of is by Shelley, which can be referred to for proof of what I am saying. With these exceptions, however, it is much to the purpose of that in Job, on which it is evidently modelled. Permission is granted to Mephistopheles to try the strength of his temptations upon Faust, and the scene closes with the extraordinary stage direction, “Heaven shuts and the archangels separate,” and Mephistopheles left alone, soliloquizes on the kindness of the Deity in being so affable even with the devil.

I shall attempt the anthem of the angels—it has some indestructible essence in it, and although it has been treated first and last even worse than poor John Barleycorn, ploughed down, tossed to and fro and mangled, no translator I have met with has succeeded in quite extinguishing it.

MICHAEL.....The sun contends as erst and eye,
 With kindred spheres in joyous sound.
 And brings his first appointed way
 • In paths of thunder always round.
 Angelic powers his sight inspires,
 Though none his secret mystery knows,
 And rolling spheres and glorious fires
 Are glorious as at first they rose.

GABRIEL.....Swift—inconceivably—away—
 The earth pursues her rolling flight,
 And alternates celestial day
 With deep, and chill, and shudd’ring night.
 It foams—the ocean—broad and free—
 On rocks and shallows far and near—
 While hurries on with rocks and ●,
 The ever swift revolving sphere.

RAPHAEL.....Contending storms through ether sweep,
 And sea and land by turns invade,
 Yet chained in nature’s systems deep,
 And still to them subservient made.

Precursor of the thunder's roar,
 In fire, destruction marks its way,
 Yet Thee thy servants most adore,
 Lord, in the peaceful beams of day.

A L L.....Angelic powers thy sight inspires,
 Though none thy secret mystery knows,
 And rolling spheres and glorious fires,
 Are glorious as at first they rose.

We are now introduced to Faust, and we find him first in his character of an University Professor, in an old Gothic chamber of an ancient tower, among musty parchments, strange apparatus, and antiquated furniture. It is late in the night, and he seems to have just thrown aside his books in despair and disappointment, to muse on the results of his application, on the arts and uses of his life, and he finds them—nothing. He discusses the value and substance of the sciences and studies among which he has so long been seeking repose of spirit and finding none, and he pronounces them vain and illusory, and exclaims bitterly against the deceit they have so long been wont to put on him, and through his means on others. He rhapsodizes his regret for the always inevitable and now irreparable waste of his life—of time and energies created and given him expressly to be wasted, and for that only, fitted and predestinated. He looks out at the window and speaks to the only face he sees, to the only companion he is wont to welcome.

Thou full orb'd moon—oh could thy light
 Behold my sorrows end to-night!
 Thou, whom so oft with pensive brow
 To-night's high noon I've watch'd as now,
 While hither thy consoling ray
 O'er books and papers found its way.
 Oh could I to the mountain's height
 Float off, all buoyant in thy light,
 Or flit with ghosts the abysses over,
 O'er meadows in thy glimmering hover,
 Or bathe, from wisdom's sorrows free,
 In floods of dew all fresh from thee.

Wo—still in prison, fast and deep,
 Accursed noisome donjon keep,
 Where Heaven's own light on weary walls,
 Through painted windows dimly falls—
 'Mid piles of books, which smoke and dust
 And worms long since have made their prey,
 And household stuffs, which moth and rust
 Are hastening in their old decay—

Heaped up—tools—boxes—glasses—climb
Till the old chamber seems to be
The omnium gatherum of Time—
Is this a world—a world for thee.

Why throbs the breast with secret pain?
The anxious spirit questions why?
Earth and its hopes allure in vain,
The aching heart and weary eye.
Instead of Nature's vistas free,
Where man Creation's purpose owns,
In dust and smoke surrounding thee,
Are skeletons and ghastly bones.

Arise—seek out that distant land—
See here the great mysterious book,
The work of Nostradamus' hand—
For better guidance wouldst thou look.
The starry world unclosed at length,
Its light shall on thy soul diffuse,
And teach thee with a spirit's strength,
The tongue's communing spirits use.

In vain unkenn'd and idly here
Must these dread signets meet mine eye!
Mysterious powers that hover near,
Oh if ye hear my voice—reply.

His aspirations are at first for the converse of lofty and holy beings, the spirits of the macrocosm, or to phrase it somewhat incorrectly, the greater universe. It is to arrive at these that he resolves to pass the bounds of lawful knowledge, and grasps the forbidden book—his nerves become electric with a delightful and supernatural excitement and his mind fills with visions of glory—yet he regards the sign of the macrocosm long and wistfully, and dares not speak it out. He fixes on that of the spirit of the earth, the active and beneficent principle of nature—he utters it, and the spirit stands before him; but his mortal courage quails at the fearful sight; and he turns away his eyes in terror. He recovers himself directly and attempts to assert his dignity, and claims an equality with his tremendous visitor, but it is too late; the spirit spurns him and disappears, leaving him to relapse into his sombre meditations, which gather double bitterness from this new trial and failure of his strength. His eye rests on a flask of poison—he takes it down and resolves on an escape through the grave to a change of scene, since all his better hopes have failed him; but at this moment he hears at a distance a sound of rejoicing, a peal of bells for Easter morning, and the chorus of the youths and maidens—the anthem in which in other days his

voice had often joined. He puts the poison aside and lends his thoughts to this new impulse—the faith of his early devotions is long since extinct, but their feelings are not quite forgotten, and their remembered thrill prevails over the attractions of death. The song is renewed and this long scene closes with it. In the next we find Mephistopheles. He does not come like the greater spirit in power and terror—as one who must be met in pride and strength, after having been sought by

“Superior science, penance, daring
By length of watching, strength of mind and skill
In knowledge of our fathers”—

For such are not the ministers of harm. It is the mean fiend who comes like a black dog to scrape acquaintance, who offers himself to be picked up in the street as if by accident, and to make cautious and gradual discovery of his real character. In such a disguise Mephistopheles finds admittance to the study of the recluse, and he makes use of the opportunity to disturb his meditations, which commence in a softer mood than any in which we have yet seen Faust. He is full of the feeling of his evening walk. He has seen the sun go down, and the influence of the “heavenliest hour of heaven” has not been lost even on his scared sympathies. He retains, though on the verge of his perdition, enough of his better nature to love a glorious sunset, to be solemnized by it, sobered, saddened, yet soothed and cheered. In such a mood he enters his retirement—he speaks as if he had forgotten that there was sorrow in the world.

Retire we now from field and hill,
As closes in the evening hour,
And with a soft yet boding thrill,
The soul awakes its holier power—
And each inordinate desire,
And each intemperate impulse dies,
As Charity's rekindling fire
And God's own love revive and rise.

He is interrupted here by the howlings of the poodle, to whom sentiments like these cannot fail to be unpalatable; but he stills him and goes on, paying that pole-star of the student, his lonely lamp, a tribute, which must find an echo in the bosom of every man who takes the true distinction between being alone and feeling solitary—between crowds and society—between noise and enjoyment.

Ah when within our narrow cell,
Again the friendly taper glows,
A light is in the breast as well
And in the heart itself that knows.
Reason resumes her lofty themes—
Hope blooms anew with promise rife—
And oh—we languish for the streams—
We languish for the springs of life.

This gleam of milder thought is already passing off—but he sits down to a theological disquisition, in the course of which the dog becomes outrageous, for, perverse and unprincipled as his taste is, he has the merit of being consistent in the feeling and persevering in the expression of it, so much so that Faust, annoyed at last, attempts to turn him out of doors, and a contest takes place, in the course of which the real character of the stranger is discovered, and Mephistopheles stands forth to personate it. Their conversations are long—I shall not amplify upon them now—the result is that Faust sells, or rather, so recklessly does he bargain, gives away his soul, and the covenant is signed in blood. Yet he does get some promises of enjoyment as part of the conditions, and he scornfully tells the adversary, the poor devil as he calls him, that it will not be in his power to fulfil this promise, or to shed one ray of pleasure upon a soul like his. Mephistopheles in reply taunts him with his attempted suicide, and his relenting when he heard the Easter songs and bells, intimating that the pleasures and affections of humanity have still some hold upon his breast. But he denies the inference.

What though that sweet remembered tone
Recall'd my soul from fearful thought,
And soothing dreams like childhood's own,
An instant o'er my fancy brought.
Still will I curse the spells that bind
Our natures to this foul abyss,
The cheats that keep the chainless mind
A prisoner in a den like this.
Be curs'd henceforth the spirit's deeming
And lofty aim, itself to know—
Accurs'd the dazzling pomp of seeming,
The world's all captivating show.
Curs'd be our visions of enduring
In name and fame to times to come,
And curs'd our ties, yet more alluring,
Of wife, dependants, friends, and home.
Accurs'd be mammon, when with treasure
He waits high enterprise to crown,
And when for our inglorious pleasure,
He smooths luxurious pillows down.

Curs'd be the vine—may curses scathe
 Each once loved form our hearts recall.
 Accurs'd be hope—accurs'd be faith—
 And curs'd endurance more than all.

These are the outpourings of a humor, which only comes over one occasionally, and which must be felt to be expressed, for for such passages every moment of inspiration is not the happy one. Genius is a will o' the wisp which nothing but another will o' the wisp can follow—and that will not—many a man—every man perhaps at times is as capable of execration when his wounded spirit stirs and stings within him as Gœthe's self—he becomes, so to speak, a genius for the moment—*ad hoc*—but then he has his own griefs to pour out in his own way, and will not curse in harness. When the heart sickens and rebels in its convulsive energy, its deep and baneful indignation and fearful eloquence are uncontrollably its own—they cannot be improved for the purposes of society like steam or gunpowder and made to work particular machinery, or crammed into some particular cannon, to drive such a thunderbolt of cursing as this of Faust's through the barriers that separate language from language. Feeling may do much for an imitation; it may flow like a stream from a fish-pond through the track which a torrent has marked out; but where is the power, the depth, the glory, the devastation of the giant,

Lapides adesos
 Stirpesque raptas et pecus et domos
 Volventis una non sine magno
 Clamore montium vicinae que sylvæ.

Yet feeling may do much, and that too while it is still capable of being governed and directed, but not unless it be very capable also of ceasing to be so, and even in some danger of it; and the man who has that feeling in any high degree, and who makes such an effort as the one in question with any thing like success, should have a mark set on him, and an injunction should always lie signed in chancery ready to come down at an instant's warning on his person and estate. All may be well while his safety valves work easily; but who shall calculate the effect of a scolding wife, adversity, loss of reputation, or a fog.